

# Political Influences on Solo Trumpet Literature in 1930s Europe: An Examination of Works by Karl Pilss and Paul Hindemith

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## ABSTRACT

As the National Socialist Party rose to power in Germany in the 1930s and subsequently expanded their empire to surrounding areas, they employed a variety of means in an attempt to control the lives of their constituents and conquered populations. A Chamber of Music, the *Reichsmusikkammer* (RMK), sought to promote traditional Germanic and Romantic style music while condemning and banning music representing many twentieth-century trends. These efforts resulted in some composers and musicians being labeled as ‘degenerate,’ while others found greater success and prominence. This document focuses specifically on Karl Pilss from Austria and Paul Hindemith from Germany and how their contrasting works for solo trumpet from these years were influenced by political and social factors.

Pilss composed two trumpet works, a concerto and sonata, and was heavily involved with the *Trompeterchor der Stadt Wien* (Vienna Brass Ensemble) that had Nazi ties. His works are deeply rooted in the late Romantic idiom characterized by Strauss and he was viewed favorably by the regime. His Trumpet Sonata was written for and dedicated to Helmut Wobisch, a prominent trumpeter in Vienna who also had Nazi ties, though his level of involvement continues to be an item of question. While successful at the time, Pilss does not hold a central place in the contemporary repertoire; his Trumpet Concerto remains virtually unknown.

Paul Hindemith is one of the most famous German composers from the 1900s. His music, unlike Pilss’s, is quintessentially twentieth-century and represents different sub-genres common to the era. He was under constant scrutiny by the RMK and eventually fled to the United States. His Trumpet Sonata includes various musical references to his struggles and serves as a stark contrast to Pilss’s works, though all were composed within a five-year span. Decades later, their roles have seemingly reversed with Hindemith enjoying notoriety and frequent performances.

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## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century was a time of great change worldwide. From industry, to science and medicine, to arts and music, the 1900s were truly remarkable. Advances that improved efficiency, prolonged life expectancy, and challenged centuries-long tradition and doctrine are countered by times of equal horror and outright inhumanity. Of course, prior to the turn of the twentieth century, such trends also occurred: war has been a staple between cultures and societies as long as recorded history exists. And while history prior to 1900 laid the foundation for everything to follow, the past century's advances and blemishes are of particular significance. World War I, the Great War, was quickly eclipsed by World War II, which challenged every preconceived notion about war and the human condition.

Art of all kinds has been used throughout history as a means to deal with the stark realities that war and fear instigate. Oppressive and tyrannical regimes have also used it effectively as a propaganda tool to influence their constituents. This document focuses specifically on how music was used in the years leading up to World War II from contrasting compositional perspectives. The drastically changing political and social climate in Europe, specifically Germany and Austria, coupled with the continuing transition from Romantic to twentieth-century era music created an environment of artistic instability that saw vastly different types of works created and for uniquely different purposes. Karl Pilss (1902–1979) and Paul Hindemith (1895–1963) had near opposite experiences creating music in 1930s Europe. This document examines their lives and solo trumpet works as a result of these experiences.

The troubled political climate and rise to power of the National Socialist Party had a direct effect on solo trumpet literature in Europe. In the span of roughly a single decade, the late-Romantic style music typified by Pilss proved to be in direct contrast with the twentieth-century style works of Hindemith. Many decades later, shedding more light on these two composers and their experiences gives us a more informed perspective and perhaps influences how we interpret and indeed judge their existence and music.

## CHAPTER 2 – GERMANY BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS

The years between the world wars saw Germany in a state of disarray. They had lost in the Great War and thus became subject to rule and military occupation by the victors. The Weimar Republic was generally ineffective: “[t]hrough the inauspicious Treaty of Versailles, the German Reich had lost not only its colonies but also 13 percent of its home territory.”<sup>1</sup> These years saw a dilapidated German population and one with a scarred and uncertain national identity. The expansion of new trade routes through German towns and waterways whittled away at what was left of the old German culture. Many Germans sought refuge in the arts, specifically music, celebrating composers like Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner for their characteristic German sound. Yet this movement to salute the past was not accepted by all – rather, many young Germans with few pre-WWI memories “had lost their faith in the Romantic ethos.”<sup>2</sup> A younger generation of aspiring artists had ideas of their own that differed greatly from the preceding strong German musical heritage.

By the early 1930s, the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (henceforth referred to as the National Socialist Party or Nazi Party) and Adolph Hitler (1889–1945) had gained significant momentum and popularity among a beleaguered German population desperate for a return to normalcy and sense of national pride. These tenets and others were a large part of what the Nazis promised and seemingly delivered at first. After a series of questionable political events, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Hitler as German

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<sup>1</sup> Albrecht Dümmling, “The Target of Racial Purity: The ‘Degenerate Music’ Exhibition in Düsseldorf, 1938,” in *Art, Culture, and Media Under the Third Reich* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.



chancellor in January of 1933, a major step with then unrecognized far-reaching consequences.<sup>3</sup>

Among Hitler's most notable executive leaders was Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945). Goebbels wasted little time in establishing various commissions, councils, and chambers to oversee the promotion and enforcement of National Socialist ideals. History remembers the Nazis primarily for their atrocious acts committed during the Holocaust, and unquestionably deservedly so, but prior to that they had many other plans for their ideal, Aryan dominated, society. Few of these plans came to full fruition. The term now used to refer to this effort is 'Germanization' and it extended to almost every facet of German life.<sup>4</sup>

From the offices that Goebbels created, it was clear that, "[t]he arts occupied a central position in the ideology and propaganda of National Socialism."<sup>5</sup> He created and oversaw, among others, a Chamber of Culture, the *Reichskulturkammer* (RKK). This office was comprised of seven divisions: literature, film, radio, music, theater, visual/fine arts, and the press. Each office had its own leadership, but this was merely a formality as most important decisions came from the RKK and Goebbels himself.<sup>6</sup> Thousands of German workers in these various fields were affected by a string of new rules and regulations set

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<sup>3</sup> Hindenburg appointed Hitler as chancellor after pressure from various political entities. After Hindenburg's death in 1934, the office of President was disbanded and Hitler assumed the all-powerful title of Führer.

<sup>4</sup> Pamela M. Potter, "Music in the Third Reich: The Complex Task of 'Germanization,'" in *The Arts in Nazi Germany: Continuity, Conformity, Change*, ed. Jonathan Huener and Francis R. Nicosia (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 85-86.

<sup>5</sup> Alan E. Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, & Economics in Nazi Germany: the Reich Chambers of Music, Theater, and Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Pamela M. Potter, "Reichsmusikkammer." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.usd.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/42942> (accessed June 27, 2012).

forth by these offices. The figure below illustrates how these offices were organized within the RKK. The shape is appropriate, as Goebbels was indeed at the center and all major decisions stemmed from him.

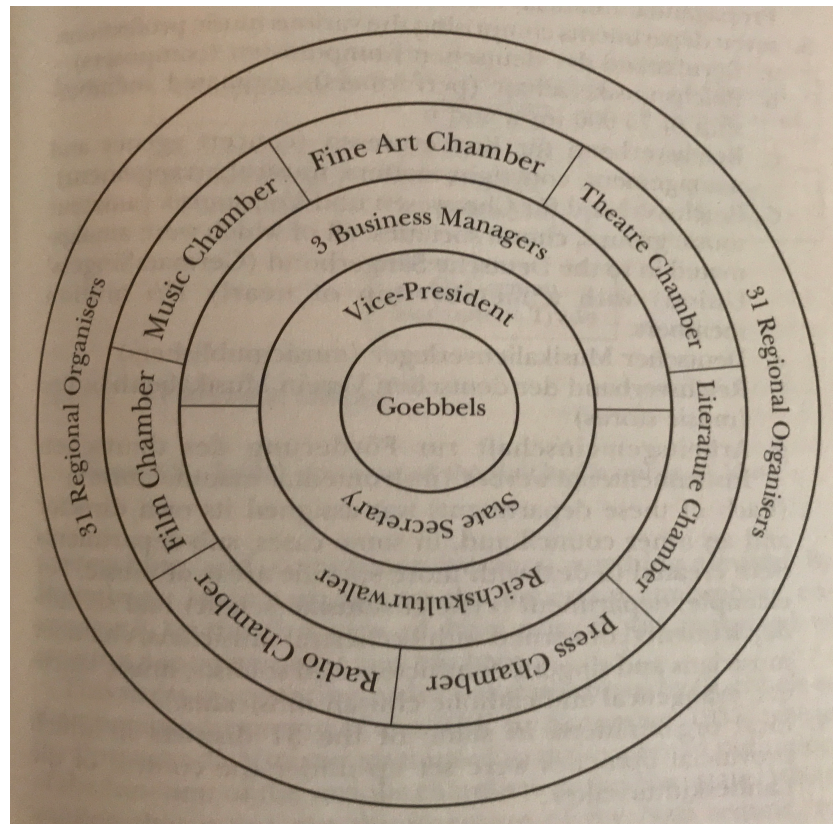


Figure 1. Breakdown of RKK hierarchical structure, from Goebbels to regional level<sup>7</sup>

“We now have German theater, German film, German press, German literature, German art, German music, and German radio,” Goebbels boasted about the successes of the RKK and its subsidiaries during a 1936 speech. “This change in personnel, organization, and direction proceeded without any friction of disruption. And at no other time in Germany have German artists been so revered, and German art so desired and respected as it is today.”<sup>8</sup> While an international audience likely would have rebuffed some

<sup>7</sup> Erik Levi, *Music in the Third Reich* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 25.

<sup>8</sup> Potter, ‘Germanization,’ 85.

of these claims, the centralization and indeed ‘Germanization’ of these cultural aspects was deemed fairly successful for the first several years of the new regime.

The division of music under the RKK was the *Reichsmusikkammer* (RMK). Its main directives were to “promote and administer German music, offer guidance, and regulate ... professional musicians,” as well as “purge and control its membership ... [and] fight against ‘unsuitable’ elements.”<sup>9</sup> Concerning the areas Goebbels mentioned in the above speech, Pamela Potter, a leading scholar on music and culture in the Third Reich, argues that music was likely the most difficult of the seven RKK branches to regulate: “[b]y its very nature, music usually conveys no clear messages or meanings, especially when it stands alone without any text, choreography, or other dramatic or visual cues. For this reason, it has been easier to assign arbitrary labels to music than to other forms of cultural output, but also more difficult to justify these labels.”<sup>10</sup> Whether or not one agrees with all of Potter’s assertions, it is clear that music caused Goebbels and RMK leadership a good deal of trouble during the mid 1930s.

At first, leadership positions in the above-mentioned offices were filled with notable Germans in favor with the party for the purpose of recognition and perceived legitimacy. The first RMK leader was the famed Richard Strauss (1864–1949) whose appointment “was the logical consequence of a lifetime of efforts spent on behalf of the professional interests of German musicians in general and composers in particular.”<sup>11</sup> Strauss was not a member of the Nazi party, nor was he known to be anti-Semitic, both of

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Meyer, *The Politics of Music in the Third Reich* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 98-99.

<sup>10</sup> Potter, ‘Germanization,’ 90-91.

<sup>11</sup> Michael H. Kater, *Composers of the Nazi Era: Eight Portraits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 216.

which eventually put him at odds with the Nazi hierarchy. Rather, his interests were musical: during his tenure he sought to preserve and even perform works by banned composers such as Debussy and Mahler. He often failed to fire Jewish musicians at the request of the RMK and was known to work with Jewish librettist Stefan Zweig. In 1935, after less than two years as its president, Strauss was dismissed after his correspondence with Zweig, which contained anti-Nazi sentiments, was intercepted. Strauss would later find himself involved in composing music for a Nazi-sanctioned brass ensemble, which I discuss later.

After Strauss's dismissal, Goebbels appointed a new president of the RMK, Peter Raabe, who he used to keep a closer watch over the Reich's musical activities. The RMK did have deputy leader, Wilhelm Furtwängler, but he resigned because, among other reasons, he continued to advocate for and program Paul Hindemith's masterpiece *Mathis der Maler* (symphony, 1934; opera, 1938). The RMK, in spite of its strict codes and limitations had a large membership: in 1937 there were 95,600 documented members, compared to 35,060 for the visual arts and 41,100 for theater.<sup>12</sup> Policies implemented were often inconsistent and many musicians fell in and out of favor with Nazi leadership and guidelines on numerous occasions, namely Hindemith.

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<sup>12</sup> Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, Economics*, 4-6.

### CHAPTER 3 – KARL PILSS: COMPOSER BEHIND THE TIMES?

In the context of famous and prolific European composers throughout the past several centuries, Karl Pilss's name is likely to be left out, though certainly not due to a lack of quality or quantity of his music. As John Wacker confirms in his 2008 dissertation: "Karl Pilss and his music have been largely overlooked by mainstream musical society. Whether by accident or design, few musicians and fewer audiences have heard his numerous compositions for brass."<sup>13</sup> Even amongst professional trumpeters and scholars, his Trumpet Concerto is largely unknown and seldom performed. Europe during the first several decades of the twentieth century was a proverbial melting pot of new and daring musical ideas. Pilss, while his music is well written and indeed aurally pleasing, offered nothing by the way of new or daring.

Born in Vienna in 1902, Karl Hermann Pilss experienced a musical upbringing. His father was a horn player in a local worker's band and other family members participated in both amateur and professional musical activities. Both Karl and his brother, Anton, possessed perfect pitch. His musical studies began at a young age and consisted of piano, theory, and basic composition. He studied under notable teachers throughout Vienna and expanded his interests to playing harpsichord and accompanying. Additionally, he developed a keen affinity towards both orchestral and choral music.<sup>14</sup>

The above paragraph seemingly outlines the majority of information known about Pilss's early life. Both Wacker and Robert Suggs, who are referenced, note that there is a

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<sup>13</sup> John Mainard Wacker, "An Examination of the Influence of Selected Works of Franz Schmidt on the *Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra* and the *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano* by Karl Pilss" (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 2008), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Robert James Suggs, "Karl Pilss: Late Romantic Heir to the Viennese Tradition of Trumpet and Brass Ensemble Music" (DMA diss., University of Maryland, 1998), 10-11.

certain scarcity of information available on Pilss, either in English or German. The sources that do mention Pilss generally do so briefly and offer little by the way of substantial biographical information. Some of the most prominent musical resources from the past number of decades fail to reveal much at all about Pilss's life and music.

*The New Grove Encyclopedia of Music and Musicians* makes no mention of him in any edition even as far back as the original *Grove's Encyclopedia of Music and Musicians* published in 1904. He is not mentioned in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, the primary German language music encyclopedia. The most recent entry for Pilss in *Baker's Biographical Dictionary* is found in the fifth edition published in 1958 ... Albert Hiller's article [about] Karl Pilss which appeared in *Clarino* vol. 2 was inexplicably missing from its place on the shelf at the Library of Congress.<sup>15, 16</sup>

Suggs has been a leading scholar on unearthing Pilss and most of the information available since his 1998 dissertation has been a result of his efforts. This document, however, is not a biography, but rather an examination of how Pilss's works for solo trumpet came about, his influences and ties to the Nazi party in Vienna, and how he represents the last vestiges of late Romanticism during a time when new compositional trends were more of the norm.

Though Pilss maintains a certain level of anonymity, the two composers he is most often associated with do not. Franz Schmidt (1874–1939), mentioned in the title of Wacker's dissertation, and Richard Strauss, are celebrated and known throughout the musical community, especially the latter. Both Schmidt and Strauss represent the pinnacle of high Romanticism; Suggs even goes so far as to say that Schmidt was "the last of the great Romantic symphonists."<sup>17</sup> High praise, though a debatable claim to some considering

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<sup>15</sup> Wacker, "An Examination," 3.

<sup>16</sup> A recent search of *Grove Music Online* reveals there is still no entry for Karl Pilss. He is only mentioned by name briefly in reference to having written a work dedicated to trumpeter Helmut Wobisch.

<sup>17</sup> Suggs, "Pilss," 11.

Schmidt's contemporaries. Pilss studied composition with Schmidt at the Vienna Academy of Music during the early 1920s. Even though Schmidt did not write any works for solo trumpet, his approach and style were influential and are witnessed in Pilss's repertoire.<sup>18</sup>

The relationship between Pilss and Strauss lasted until Strauss's death in 1949. While Schmidt's influence was on his early career, Suggs describes Pilss as fitting into a mold already created and honed by Strauss. As a young composer working alongside Strauss at the State Opera in Vienna, Pilss would often show scores he was working on to Strauss, who offered guidance and feedback.<sup>19</sup> Roughly forty years Pilss's senior, Strauss had already established himself as one of Europe's leading composers by the time that Pilss was starting out and working to make a name for himself in a thriving musical city.

Due in part to the connections he made through Strauss and others in the Vienna State Opera, Pilss had become acquainted with many prominent artists throughout the city. He had always possessed an affinity for brass, especially horn, however it was for trumpet that he wrote his first solo work, Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra (henceforth referred to as Trumpet Concerto, or Pilss Concerto), in 1934.<sup>20</sup> This work was written for and dedicated to the principal trumpet player of the Vienna Philharmonic at the time, Franz Dengler. Dengler split his time between the philharmonic and state opera and is credited as a founding figure of the 'Vienna trumpet sound,' a tradition he passed down to his many students and one that remains active to this day.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Schmidt was no stranger to the trumpet; it is featured often throughout his works, including his Fourth Symphony, operas, as well as several compositions for large trumpet choirs with and without organ.

<sup>19</sup> Suggs, "Pilss," 10.

<sup>20</sup> Later in his career, Pilss composed concerti for horn and bass trombone.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Suggs, "Brilliant Music for a Dark Era: Karl Pilss, Helmut Wobisch, and the Trompeterchor der Stadt Wien," *International Trumpet Guild Journal* 28, no. 2 (January 2004): 13.

Vienna has a rich history of music dating back hundreds of years and the philharmonic has been held in high esteem internationally. To this day it is recognized as one of the world's leading musical institutions. The 'Vienna trumpet sound,' though mentioned only briefly in this document, is an important part of the trumpet's history. Indeed, Robert Suggs devotes a chapter in his dissertation to the topic. For the purposes of this document, it is sufficient to know that Pilss's Concerto was written for Dengler and steeped in a rich musical tradition.

It has been established that Karl Pilss was deeply vested in the late Romantic styles characterized by Schmidt and Strauss. This, coupled with the fact that he came from a family heritage viewed favorably by the National Socialists, worked well to his advantage in the 1930s during the lead-up and eventual annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938. More about these years will be discussed in the following chapters.



## CHAPTER 4 – PILSS’S TWO SOLO TRUMPET WORKS

While the trumpet has enjoyed a rich history dating back hundreds of years (thousands when including crude instruments made from animal horns and shells), the century prior to Pilss’s 1934 Trumpet Concerto saw few solo works. Two of the most prominent pieces in the repertoire are the Haydn and Hummel Concertos, dating from 1796 and 1803 respectively, and written for the short-lived keyed trumpet. Following these two staples, the Romantic period, while producing few solo works, employed the trumpet frequently. Composers such as Wagner, Brahms, Rossini, Verdi, and Bruckner all used the trumpet extensively, though none wrote for the instrument in a solo capacity. It was during these years, as well, that valves were invented and manufacturing processes advanced, allowing for a full chromatic range. By the turn of the century, the B-flat trumpet was a standard variety of the instrument and what both Pilss and Hindemith wrote for.<sup>22</sup>

### *Concerto for Trumpet and Orchestra*

Considering that the previous 100 years had produced few solo trumpet works, Pilss’s decision to undertake a large-scale concerto is perhaps somewhat surprising. The piece follows the standard fast-slow-fast movement scheme that has remained the standard since the Baroque era. The entire work is roughly twenty-five minutes in length, which is considerably longer than normal and certainly any preceding concerti for trumpet. From the Baroque to modern day, the vast majority of trumpet concerti are between twelve and twenty minutes long. Wacker reveals that Pilss’s influences and compositional background likely played a role in the longer duration: “[m]ost orchestral works by late Romantic

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<sup>22</sup> Edward Tarr, *The Trumpet* Translated by S.E. Plank and Edward Tarr (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1988) 150-165.

composers such as Strauss, Mahler, Bruckner and Franz Schmidt are all larger than the majority of works in the orchestral repertoire both in their duration and in the forces needed for performance. Pilss was accustomed to hearing lengthy works.”<sup>23</sup>

The work was published in 1936 and is now available from Robert King Music with a piano reduction completed by the composer. The full score and many orchestral parts are missing, but the piano reduction includes various indications as to the intended instrumentation.<sup>24</sup> There is only one known recording of the piece with orchestral accompaniment and it is neither published nor readily accessible; it features Carole Dawn Reinhart on trumpet with the Hungarian National Orchestra.<sup>25</sup> A recording with piano accompaniment was procured by the author from Professor Vince DiMartino featuring Sidney Mear on trumpet and Fred Woolston on piano. This recording is dated, of relative poor quality, and is also unpublished. Despite the ease of attaining the sheet music with piano accompaniment, this work remains virtually unknown.

From the beginning of the first movement, it is clear that the work is written in a Romantic style. Pilss uses sonata-allegro form and features a main theme that is prevalent throughout the movement in various keys and by various forces.<sup>26</sup> The first movement is in concert B-flat major, but winds through various keys and uses a vast amount of chromaticism, typical of late Romantic works. There are a number of cadences that, due to the dominating triplet figure and use of *molto ritardando*, make the key centers blatantly obvious. While the movement does not have a cadenza, there are two sections, quasi

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<sup>23</sup> Wacker, “An Examination,” 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>25</sup> Suggs, “Pilss,” 232.

<sup>26</sup> When performing with piano, the accompanist must attempt to emulate the various orchestral instruments noted.

codettas, which show off the performer's virtuosity with fast sixteenth-note triplets. One occurs right before the development section (mm. 70-80) and the other as part of the retransition (mm. 117-124). Both of these end by clearly outlining the tonality that follows.

The second movement, *Largo*, is extremely slow and marked with an eighth-note at seventy-six beats per minute. The movement itself actually uses a slow-fast-slow structure with the middle section marked as *Allegretto* with muted trumpet playing various sixteenth-note passages that seemingly have a call-and-response nature with the accompaniment. Suggs reveals that while the middle section may seem unrelated to the outside material, it is roughly based on the harmonic motif from the beginning theme, reminiscent of a slow funeral march or chorale.<sup>27</sup>

The final movement uses two main thematic ideas that, like the first movement, are played in varying keys. The first is a march motif in the key of concert B-flat, accompanied by a recurring tonic-dominant rhythmic figure. The return of the home key and this rhythmic figure alludes to a sense of finality. Pilss though, in a typical Romantic style, introduces a second theme, but one that also forecasts an upcoming close. This theme is in concert A-flat and is introduced by the trumpet, but unlike previous themes throughout the entire work, this one stays rooted in the key and is very melodic and diatonic. Suggs calls it a 'big tune' and reveals that other notable Romantic composers such as Grieg and Tchaikovsky employed this soaring type of melody in third movements of their own works.<sup>28</sup>

Both the march and 'big tune' come back one last time, the latter in the home key of concert B-flat. It is clear that the end is near and Pilss helps to signal that by having the

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<sup>27</sup> Suggs, "Pilss," 97-99.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 102.

solo trumpet ascend to a high concert D-flat with marked quarter notes before descending and cadencing on the tonic. And, of course, in the tradition of great drama typical of Romanticism, Pilss ends the movement and indeed piece as a whole with a coda marked *Allegro vivo*, using ascending triplet figures and finally the march motif that leads to a triumphant ending on a high B-flat.

Though this concerto is significantly longer than most, Pilss is masterful with his pleasing melodies and alternation between soloist and accompaniment. While he follows in the footsteps of previous master composers of the Romantic era, there is seldom a sense of predictability. Pilss seems to understand well the abilities and limitations of the trumpet and he gives the soloist ample rest for the most part. Suggs summarizes the work well by saying: “[t]his concerto, while not easy by any means, particularly in terms of control and style, is not an insurmountable work in the concerto repertoire for B-flat trumpet. The accessible tonal Romantic style makes it immediately attractive to performers and listeners alike, while still providing a worthy challenge.”<sup>29</sup>

### *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano*

Unlike his concerto, Karl Pilss’s Trumpet Sonata is a more standard length of roughly sixteen minutes; it also follows the traditional fast-slow-fast three-movement structure. Written only one year after the concerto, in 1935, Wacker notes that the sonata “shows a greater compositional maturity” with “melodic lines [that] flow better and seem more logically conceived.”<sup>30</sup> This is not to say, though, that the concerto lacks maturity or was conceived poorly. Rather, the sonata displays that Pilss attained a greater

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>30</sup> Wacker, “An Examination,” 15.

understanding of how to write for the instrument. Due to the shorter length, his ideas are more succinct, also likely a result of having composed it originally for only two instruments, rather than a full orchestra. Despite a few main differences, the two exhibit many similarities and are both fine examples of late Romantic solo compositions.

A note on the top of the music states that the work was written for and dedicated to Professor Helmut Wobisch (1912–1980), another giant figure in Vienna at the time and a star student of Dengler. Pilss met Wobisch through Dengler and the two cultivated a fruitful relationship, both musically and socially. Wobisch inherited the aforementioned ‘Vienna trumpet sound’ from Dengler and also served as principal trumpet in the philharmonic. More about Wobisch will be discussed in the following chapter, as he played an interesting role, along with Pilss, in a musical organization that had questionable political ties and/or motives.

The sonata opens in an aggressive minor tonality (g minor) with the trumpet playing a quasi march-like motif with large intervallic leaps. Within the opening section the trumpet covers a large range and aided by the use of crescendo and decrescendo it evokes a sense of rising and falling. Suggs notes this as well and refers to it as a ‘wave effect’ – something that Pilss likely heard in Schmidt’s Fourth Symphony and used as inspiration. He expounds on this thought when referring to the second theme, in D-flat major and marked *poco tranquillo*, a stark contrast to the opening: “Pilss’s close attachment to Richard Strauss is further underscored in this section which hints strongly at influences from Der Rosenkavalier. The harmonies are especially rich in [seventh] and

[ninth] chords, and there is extensive polyphonic interplay between trumpet and piano, once again building sequentially in waves.”<sup>31</sup>

Pilss uses a similar formula throughout both of these works in terms of the first and second theme’s contrasting characters. In the second movement, he mimics the sluggish tempo of the concerto’s second movement with a marking of *Adagio, molto cantabile*. And just like the concerto, the second theme is more active. Instead of writing it in a faster tempo, though, Pilss chooses to use an abundance of sixteenth, thirty-second, and even sixty-fourth notes. While this section appears more difficult than its surrounding material, it is deceiving as the slow tempo maintains. The remainder of this movement alternates between the two thematic textures before ending almost lethargically with a short muted section.

The finale of the sonata is the shortest movement of the six and does not even last four minutes. After the ending of the second movement, the third starts with energetic ascending quarter notes in the piano that introduce the trumpet in the second bar in the home key of g minor. Pilss uses this key in the outer movements while dealing predominantly in E-flat major, the submediant, in movement two. Likely by design, the trumpet’s first three notes in the first and third movements are the same, used perhaps to impose the key center and overall thematic content. The trumpet is offered little rest throughout this movement and the main theme is heard numerous times and in various keys. A traditional development section is lacking, but Pilss briefly explores other key areas, still with the same trumpet motif.

Considering the lack of rest and the up-tempo nature of the movement, it seems to end just as soon as it began. The work as a whole is probably easier than the concerto, not

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<sup>31</sup> Suggs, “Pilss,” 105-107.

necessarily due to the shorter length, but because it lacks the technical and range demands. Both works require the performer to have great flexibility as Pilss frequently writes slurred passages that span the tessitura of the instrument. Both the concerto and sonata are written for trumpet in B-flat and Wacker reveals, “[a]n historically informed performance ... should be done on [a] rotary valved [instrument].”<sup>32</sup> It is indeed likely that both Dengler and Wobisch used such a horn when playing these works, but contemporary players should feel comfortable using a standard piston instrument while taking into considering the ‘Viennese sound’ that Pilss envisioned.

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<sup>32</sup> Wacker, “An Examination,” 17.

## CHAPTER 5 – PILSS, WOBISCH, AND THE VIENNA BRASS ENSEMBLE

The previous chapter discusses Pilss's two works for solo trumpet, but his compositional output is significantly greater than these two pieces. He is perhaps most well known for his association with and works composed for the *Trompeterchor der Stadt Wien* (Vienna Brass Choir/Ensemble). The history of this group dates back to the 1920s and is discussed in much detail in both Robert Suggs' dissertation and *International Trumpet Guild* journal article from 2004. By the mid 1930s, the ensemble had established itself as one of the premier groups throughout Western Europe and attracted fine performers and conductors, as well as composers to write new works for it. Pilss, due to his associations with Schmidt, Strauss, Dengler, and Wobisch naturally became involved with the group and from 1934 to 1944, he "became a virtual house-composer for the group, writing the vast majority of his almost 50 brass ensemble works for them."<sup>33</sup>

The musical community in pre-WWII Vienna was a tight-knit group, especially among brass players and those composers writing new works for such instruments. Wobisch, who already had duties in the philharmonic and opera, joined the *Trompeterchor* in 1934 and not long after assumed a leadership position as well as, unsurprisingly, its principal trumpet role. Wobisch was a student of Dengler, but also of the instrument and played a large role in promoting and commissioning new works, unearthing old music, and even in helping design a new type of fanfare trumpet.<sup>34</sup> It is impossible to discuss the trumpet in Europe during these years without mentioning Helmut Wobisch.

Many of the countries in Western and Central Europe are only moderately sized and share borders with one another. World War I ravaged these areas, not just Germany,

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<sup>33</sup> Suggs, "Brilliant Music," 13.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



and the rebuilding process was still underway into the 1930s. Suggs describes the environment: “Austria had suffered greatly following the collapse of its empire at the end of World War I and there was strong sentiment in Vienna and throughout Austria for unification with Germany.”<sup>35</sup> This sentiment was not universal, but Hitler knew that his ideals appealed to many beyond Germany’s borders and in April of 1938 he annexed Austria.<sup>36</sup> The two countries are similar, sharing a language and some customs, but Hitler knew that to truly win support in Austria he had to appeal to the masses. And what better method than with music?

It is in this context that the association between Karl Pilss, Helmut Wobisch, the *Trompeterchor der Stadt Wien*, and the National Socialist Party is established. Even dating back to before Hitler took control there are accounts of early incarnations of the brass ensemble playing at rallies and events to stir up interest and support for the Nazis. Perhaps the culmination, though, occurred on April 9, 1938 when, “to the cheers of his Austrian supporters, [Hitler] passed by the [Vienna] Opera House ... serenaded by the *Trompeterchor*.”<sup>37</sup> The group was playing works composed by Karl Pilss.

As had occurred in Germany, the Nazis attempted to take control of all aspects of cultural life in Austria. The state opera, philharmonic, and *Trompeterchor*, as well as most other artistic institutions were used as propaganda tools under the RKK/RMK-like Office of Culture. Work did not stop, however, and Suggs notes that, “at the cost of a dark stain

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> This time became known as the *Anschluss*, which translates to ‘annexation,’ but refers specifically to the years that Austria was under Nazi control.

<sup>37</sup> Suggs, “Brilliant Music,” 13-14.

on its reputation ... the Trompeterchor reached its highest level of activity.”<sup>38</sup> The group essentially became the house ensemble for Nazi events in Austria from 1939 until 1944. It commissioned around 100 compositions, the majority by Pilss, but others as well, including Richard Strauss. In April of 1943, the fifth anniversary of the *Anschluss*, a concert was held in Vienna featuring a newly commissioned work composed by Strauss. The event was invite-only and attended by the ‘who’s who’ of Austria’s Nazi contingency: high officials from the city government, military officers, and the SS. The program also featured works by Wagner and Beethoven, played by orchestra.<sup>39</sup>

As soon as the war ended, questions were raised about the level of involvement many of these musicians and composers had during the Nazi occupation. Musicians in many of the top groups in Nazi occupied territories were exempt from any military service and as many as forty-two percent of the Vienna Philharmonic had joined the Nazi party. The prevailing excuse after the war was self-preservation. “Some joined the party out of sincere beliefs, but musicians eager for career advancement often felt pressure to join. Artistic talent was still of overriding importance, but loyalty to the regime was of equal importance.”<sup>40</sup>

Neither Pilss nor Strauss ever joined the Nazi party, despite their heavy involvement in musical activities promoting it. Regarding Wobisch, there are conflicting accounts. Suggs, who is recognized as one of the leading scholars on these topics, never asserts that Wobisch joined the party. There are other accounts that say Wobisch did in fact join the Nazi party in 1934. Regardless, he unquestionably had a number of dubious

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Suggs, “Pilss,” 199-200.

connections and after the war he was placed on probation and not allowed to perform publically for two years. He was also fired from the Philharmonic, but was eventually rehired as principal trumpet and later took on the role of the orchestra's manager.<sup>41</sup>

Wobisch's reputation and involvement with the Nazis is not universally known and after his probation period he enjoyed a long and successful career. He is best remembered today for having completed the first long-playing recording of Haydn's Trumpet Concerto in 1950. His cadenza from that work is also one of the most frequently used.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Suggs, "Brilliant Music," 15.

<sup>42</sup> Suggs, "Pilss," 161.

## CHAPTER 6 – PAUL HINDEMITH AND HIS TRUMPET SONATA

The preceding pages and chapters have outlined the artistic and musical scene in pre-war Germany and Austria and how Nazi policies played a role in promoting certain music and musicians in their favor. The RKK and RMK, as mentioned, played an equal role, though, in regulating and expelling art that did not fit their vision. Paul Hindemith, during the early to mid 1930s, walked a fine line with his compositions. His experiences during these years serve as a contrasting example to Pilss.

Hindemith had a unique experience living and starting his musical career in Germany during the inter-war years and, as with most composers, he matured as his career progressed. His beginnings reveal that he accepted and indeed championed the modernist musical ways in the aftermath of WWI. Joel Haney reveals in his dissertation on Hindemith's post-WWI years that he was, "[r]eared in the German academic tradition during his conservatory years [and] quickly absorbed the technical innovations and expressive ambitions of turn-of-the-century modernism."<sup>43</sup> The 1920s, though a difficult time for life in Germany, were when Hindemith began to develop his personal style and gain notoriety for his works, not only as a composer, but also a performer and educator.

Along with his vast output of works, Hindemith is remembered equally for his work as a music scholar and advocate. The term *gebrauchsmusik* is frequently used in connection to Hindemith, though Rickey Bogard explains, "[t]his term is not used exclusively in connection with Hindemith's music, but is often used by historians to explain the idiomatic writing in evidence in his compositions compared to the more

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<sup>43</sup> Joel Christian Haney, "The Emergence of a Postwar Musical Outlook: Hindemith's 'Hard-Edged Simplicity,' 1919-1922" (Ph.D diss., Yale University, 2006), 2.

abstract and technically demanding works of his contemporaries.”<sup>44</sup> In its most simple terms, *gebrauchsmusik* is functional music or ‘music for use,’ frequently intended for young and amateur musicians. In his quest to promote music among such crowds, Hindemith composed works in this vane that were accessible, enjoyable, and useful. From the mid 1920s until the 1950s, he composed a multitude of sonatas – at least one for every instrument of the orchestra – as well as other music, including *Sing und Spiel Musik* (Music to Sing and Play), also intended for amateurs.<sup>45</sup>

Hindemith did not take kindly to rules. He learned traditional harmony and form in his musical youth, both things that he learned how to bend and break as he matured. When the National Socialists took control in 1933, the new regime seemed, at first, friendly to Hindemith and some musicians; many had been out of work for years due to the stagnant economy and sky-high inflation experienced during the Weimar Republic. “The Nazis invested financially in several orchestras, including the Berlin Philharmonic,” but preference was always given to those who joined the Nazi party.<sup>46</sup>

A subdivision of the RMK that had a direct effect on Hindemith was called the *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* (Militant League for German Culture, KFDK). Nazi ideologue and ‘racial theorist’ Alfred Rosenberg headed this committee that monitored the activities of composers in Germany. From the beginning, Hindemith was in ill favor with

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<sup>44</sup> Rickey G. Bogard, “The Trumpet in Selected Solo and Chamber Works of Paul Hindemith: Elements of Trumpet Technique and their Relationship to the *Gebrauchsmusik* Concept” (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 1994), 2.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>46</sup> Craig L. Retzlaff, “World War II Symbolism and Programmatic Content in Paul Hindemith’s *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano*,” (MM thesis, California State University, Long Beach, 2008), 6-7.

Rosenberg because his music was considered ‘not German,’ and degenerate.<sup>47</sup> Some of Hindemith’s most successful and celebrated works were written during these years, yet he also had to deal with being called an ‘atonal noisemaker’ and a ‘cultural bolshevist.’<sup>48</sup>

These conditions were certainly not favorable for Hindemith, but for the sake of safety and continued employment he chose to appease the authorities at times. Retzlaff describes the situation:

After his music received intense criticism from the Nazi regime, Hindemith began to show efforts of appeasement which were met with mixed reactions from various Nazi officials. He conducted his music at various Nazi ceremonies, and his music began to be extremely popular with the Hitler Youth groups. His conformity was a means of satisfying an administration he thought would be temporary as he seemed to feel the political situation would be short lived. Hindemith felt that the Nazis would not be in power long and that the world would return to normal in due time.<sup>49</sup>

Over the next several years, Hindemith was in and out of favor with the KFDK and the RMK for various works, especially his masterpiece *Mathis der Maler* (Matthias the Painter). Due to his fame carried over from the Weimar years and international acclaim, Hindemith was afforded more liberties than other composers, but his works were banned from performance entirely in 1936, a decision made by Goebbels himself.

While Hindemith was not a Jew, his wife did have distant Jewish heritage so they opted to leave Germany in 1938 for Switzerland. It was during this time that Hindemith began work on his Sonata for Trumpet and Piano. The buildup to war in Germany was fresh in his mind and ear and he used these experiences in his compositional process.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>48</sup> Michael H. Kater, *Composers of the Nazi Era: Eight Portraits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 31-56.

<sup>49</sup> Retzlaff, “World War II Symbolism,” 8.

Switzerland provided refuge for a short time, but in 1940 he brought his family to the United States, where they became citizens and stayed until 1953.

### *Sonata for Trumpet and Piano*

Twentieth-century music is full of ‘isms:’ serialism, neo-romanticism, neo-classicism, minimalism, post-minimalism, modernism, and post-modernism to name several. Each of these differs from the next, but all are subgenres common to music from the 1900s and beyond. Hindemith is most often labeled as a modernist or neoclassicist and certainly there are works in his vast output that display each of these compositional styles. His Trumpet Sonata, however, is difficult to classify into just one of these categories. Rather than analyze the piece movement by movement, for the sake of this document it is more beneficial to point out specific passages that have significant meaning. This work is a clear representation of modernist twentieth-century composition and a stark contrast to the two Pilss works previously examined, even though Hindemith’s Sonata dates only four years after Pilss’s.

Scholars have debated the level to which Hindemith’s Trumpet Sonata is a true example of *gebrauchsmusik*. Since its composition, the work has been a staple in the mature trumpet repertoire and is certainly not a piece that is accessible for young or amateur players. Indeed, it presents significant challenges to even the most veteran players: range, endurance, extreme dynamics, and perhaps most of all, an emotional connection.<sup>50</sup> Unlike the two Pilss works, a truly successful performance of Hindemith’s Sonata requires a deep understanding and appreciation of much of the aforementioned information regarding his life and strife in 1930s Germany.

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<sup>50</sup> Bogard, “The Trumpet,” 18.

There are several instances throughout the work with likely references and allusions to Germany in the 1930s. Beginning in the first movement, two distinct moods are presented in the piano and the trumpet. They are often at odds with one another, almost as if each is trying to gain superiority over the other. The tempo of the first movement, marked *Mit Kraft* (with vigor/force) is reminiscent of a march. Retzlaff paints an image: “[t]he performer could visualize an episode depicting one of the many Nazi parades and ceremonies. The crowds are festive and the Nazis are showing off their military might.”<sup>51</sup> Hindemith certainly was witness to the massive military buildup of the 1930s and the sound of soldiers marching was fresh in his mind.

Later in the first movement, at rehearsal seven, the piano drops out briefly to allow the trumpet to sound a siren-like call eight times, beginning pianissimo with a crescendo to fortissimo. This stark change of texture could represent the constant barrage of sirens from Nazi police or, as Retzlaff writes, the ever-increasing momentum of the Nazi influence.<sup>52</sup> Following the last siren, most performers leave a short pause, almost as if to clear the air and allow a second to aurally digest, before the main theme resumes in a new key, just as powerful as before.



Figure 2. Rehearsal 7; siren calls with increasing loudness and intensity<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Retzlaff, “World War II Symbolism,” 27.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Paul Hindemith, *Sonata for Trumpet in B-flat and Piano*, (Mainz: B. Schott’s Sohne, 1940).



The most striking passage of the work as a whole comes at the end. The third movement, labeled *Trauermusik* (funeral music), is given a non-traditional tempo of *sehr langsam* (very slowly). Hindemith, as in the preceding movements, explores the range of the instrument, both in terms of tessitura and dynamics, continually building the drama and emotion. Unlike Pilss's third movements, Hindemith's does not race to a fantastic finish. Rather, after a repeated fanfare-esque motive, the piano plays a few more measures and the work is seemingly complete.

It is a false ending, however, and three more lines of music remain, labeled *Alle Menschen müssen sterben* (All Men Must Die) and marked *sehr ruhig* (very quiet). Hindemith directly quotes a Bach chorale, BWV 643, providing a haunting closure to the work. If played well, both the performers and listeners should be left in an unsure emotional state. While there is no text present in Hindemith's work, the tune and implied text were familiar to many in the 1930s. Considering the title of the chorale, it is almost frightening how effective the ending is, especially considering it was written six years before the end of the war, and only just as the Holocaust was beginning.



Figure 3. *Alle Menschen müssen sterben* (All Men Must Die) from third movement<sup>54</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

From these examples, it is apparent that labeling Hindemith's trumpet masterpiece as one thing exclusively, save for twentieth-century, is inaccurate. Music has long been lumped into two general categories: absolute music and program music. These labels are fitting for a good portion of the repertoire prior to the 1900s, but works like Hindemith's and others composed since may necessitate the need for another category. Sonata for Trumpet and Piano is certainly not a programmatic work, but it is also not about nothing. It is up to individual musicians to discover how the work applies to them personally and in the context of Hindemith's unique situation.

## CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION:

### FROM PILSS TO HINDEMITH AND BEYOND

Most music scholars agree that there are not concrete dates that separate stylistic eras. Transition periods are often decades in length, vary by geographical region, and are impacted by social and political factors. Indeed, twentieth-century music does not start and stop at 1900 and 1999 respectively. Its name may be somewhat misleading as traces of twentieth-century compositional ideas are witnessed in the late 1800s. Conversely, there are composers who carried Romantic and other stylistic ideals well into the twentieth century. Labels are helpful and necessary and often assist in defining major trends in music and beyond, but they are certainly not all encompassing.

The main focus of this paper is to shed light on two composers with very different experiences while living and composing in the same area during the same time. Karl Pilss was celebrated while Paul Hindemith was scrutinized. Pilss enjoyed constant work while Hindemith's works were constantly examined and judged for their worth. Pilss wrote works for Nazi events that were played by Nazi musicians and heard by Nazi leadership and sympathizers. And in regard to his Trumpet Sonata, Hindemith wrote a piece that features passages that are not necessarily back-handed stabs at the country and regime that he fled from, but rather a musical answer and personal necessity in dealing with the situation.

These two composers, the three works examined, as well as scores of others they both composed are direct products of the environment created by the National Socialist Party in the 1930s. Perhaps it is odd then, that today Paul Hindemith is considerably more recognized and performed. Karl Pilss, while not entirely anonymous, pales in comparison

and the first work considered above, his Trumpet Concerto, remains virtually unknown. In the many decades since the end of WWII, the two composers have seemingly reversed roles.

Questions about the musical and artistic merit of Pilss's works, considering his associations, are especially poignant today considering many of the issues that are currently being raised and dealt with in this pitchfork nation. Is his music any less important, valuable, or worth studying or performing? Does the fact that he cooperated, perhaps more, with Nazis necessitate the shunning of his works? And Hindemith – ought he be raised up higher as a person and an artist considering all he experienced? Do his works have more musical merit? Are they deserving of more performance and study?

These questions are not easy and may even be uncomfortable to some. The answers are equally as challenging and elusive. Perhaps the amount of time elapsed has given Pilss a 'pass.' Perhaps his associations are irrelevant and it is only his creations that should be judged. Or perhaps he and his music should remain where they are, but now with a greater understanding of the surrounding history. Either way, it is abundantly clear that music played an important role in the events preceding and surrounding World War II, just as it has throughout history and will continue to do for the imaginable future.

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